sensors onboard the human transport device **106**, such as the obstacle sensor **508**. The inventory system **100**, **300** itself may utilize sensors (e.g., cameras) located throughout the workspace **102**, **302** to detect location and encroachment of unauthorized objects within designated protected areas.

At **808**, the protected area manager **220** allows the selected human transport device **106** to be within the protected area **122**, **310**. The selected human transport device **106** may be identified by a unique identifier and a current location of the human transport device **106** and the identifier may be transmitted to the management module **110**, perhaps periodically, so that the protected area manager **220** can monitor the location of the selected human transport device **106**.

The environment and individual elements described herein may of course include many other logical, programmatic, and physical components, of which those shown in the accompanying figures are merely examples that are related to the discussion herein.

The various techniques described herein are assumed in the given examples to be implemented in the general context of computer-executable instructions or software, such as program modules, that are stored in computer-readable storage and executed by the processor(s) of one or more computers or other devices such as those illustrated in the figures. Generally, program modules include routines, programs, objects, components, data structures, etc., and define operating logic for performing particular tasks or implement particular abstract data types.

Other architectures may be used to implement the described functionality, and are intended to be within the scope of this disclosure. Furthermore, although specific distributions of responsibilities are defined above for purposes of discussion, the various functions and responsibilities might be distributed and divided in different ways, depending on circumstances.

Similarly, software may be stored and distributed in various ways and using different means, and the particular software storage and execution configurations described above may be varied in many different ways. Thus, software implementing the techniques described above may be distributed on various types of computer-readable media, not limited to the forms of memory that are specifically described.

CONCLUSION

Although the subject matter has been described in language specific to structural features and/or methodological acts, it is to be understood that the subject matter defined in the appended claims is not necessarily limited to the specific features or acts described. Rather, the specific features and acts are disclosed as exemplary forms of implementing the claims.

What is claimed is:

1. An inventory-handling system to transport a user within a workspace of the inventory-handling system, the inventory-handling system comprising:

a first device to transport users within the workspace;

a second device to transport the users within the workspace; and

a management module to:

receive a first request relating to a first task to be completed by a user;

receive a second request relating to a second task to be completed by a qualified user;

prioritize the first request and the second request based at least in part on an availability of qualified users capable of handling the second task;

generate a first task assignment corresponding to the first request;

generate a second task assignment corresponding to the second request, wherein the first task assignment and the second task assignment are to be completed according to a prioritization of the first request and the second request;

transmit the first task assignment to the first device;

transmit the second task assignment to the second device;

direct movement of the first device with the user therein to a first destination location within the workspace along a first route; and

direct movement of the second device with the qualified user therein to a second destination location within the workspace along a second route, wherein the first route and the second route are planned in relation to known routes of one or more active drive units within the workspace to avoid collisions between the first device, the second device, and the one or more active drive units within the workspace.

2. The inventory-handling system as recited in claim **1**, wherein at least one device of the first device or the second device comprises a user identification (ID) component to receive a user ID of an associated user of the at least one device, the at least one device being further configured to determine, based at least in part on receiving the user ID, that the associated user has entered the at least one device before transporting the associated user to the first destination location or the second destination location.

3. The inventory-handling system as recited in claim **1**, wherein at least one device of the first device or the second device comprises an extendable physical barrier to at least partially surround the at least one device when the extendable physical barrier is extended from a collapsed state where the extendable physical barrier is relatively closer to the at least one device to an extended state where the extendable physical barrier is relatively further away from the at least one device such that the extendable physical barrier defines an area around the at least one device when in the extended state.

4. The inventory-handling system as recited in claim **1**, further comprising a protected area manager to:

designate an area around at least one of the first destination location or the second destination location as a protected area;

receive an indication that an unauthorized object has entered the protected area; and

take remedial action in response to receiving the indication.

5. The inventory-handling system as recited in claim **4**, further comprising a plurality of sentinel drive units configured to be positioned at a perimeter of the protected area and to detect unauthorized objects that enter the protected area.

6. The inventory-handling system as recited in claim **5**, wherein each sentinel drive unit is configured to project a light beam toward another sentinel drive unit to detect the unauthorized objects that enter the protected area.

7. The inventory-handling system as recited in claim **4**, wherein the management module is further configured to:

determine that a portable object is within the protected area; and

direct a drive unit to clear the portable object from the protected area before arrival of the first device or the second device at the at least one destination location of the first destination location or the second destination location.